

# The Geography of the Political Spectrum

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**Class Time:** 1-2 days

**Purpose:** Students will map the modern American political spectrum, analyze the different ways it has been mapped, and understand that it may be represented in different ways depending on the political and historical circumstances.

## National Geographic Standards:

*The Uses of Geography*

17 - How to apply geography to interpret the past.

18 - How to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future.

## Indiana Social Studies Standards:

*Geography and History of the World*

- GHW.6.1 Distinguish between violent and non-violent revolution. Describe the causes and events of political revolutions in two distinct regions of the world and use maps, timelines and/or other graphic representations to document the spread of political ideas that resulted from those events to other regions of the world. (Origins, Change over Time, Spatial Variation, Diffusion)
- GHW.10.2 Analyze the formation of states (countries) in selected regions and identify and appraise the contribution of factors, such as nationalism\*, in their formation. (Change over Time, Physical Systems, Origins, National Character)
- GHW.10.3 Evaluate and predict the successes and failures of democratic reform movements in challenging authoritarian or despotic regimes in different countries. (Change over Time, Diffusion, Spatial Variation)
- GHW.10.6 Analyze the human and physical geographic forces that either bind and unite (centripetal forces\*) or divide (centrifugal forces\*) a country or countries. Predict the impact of these forces on the future of these countries. Propose strategies that countries can use to overcome the impact of centrifugal forces. (Change over Time, Spatial Distribution, Spatial Variation, National Character)
- USH.3.8 Describe the Progressive movement and its impact on political, economic and social reform. (Government; Economics; Individuals, Society and Culture)
- USH.4.1 Give examples of support shifting to big business during the postwar period between World War I and the Great Depression. (Government, Economics)
- USH.4.3 Explain how America reacted to a changing society by examining issues associated with the Red Scare, Prohibition, the Scopes Trial, the changing role of women and African-Americans, the Ku Klux Klan, the Palmer Raids, the National Origins Act, and restrictions on immigration. (Government; Economics; Geography; Individuals, Society and Culture)
- USH.4.5 Identify and describe the contributions of political and social reformers during the Great Depression. (Government; Economics; Individuals, Society and Culture)
- USH.4.6 Describe New Deal legislation and its effect on government expansion and compare and contrast their views of New Deal proponents and opponents. (Government, Economics)
- USH.5.1 Compare and contrast President Franklin D. Roosevelt's world view with that of Germany's Adolf Hitler. (Government; Individuals, Society and Culture)
- USH.7.1 Explain the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s by describing the ideas and actions of federal and state leaders, grassroots movements, and central organizations that were active in the movement. (Government; Economics; Individuals, Society and Culture)
- USH.7.3 Identify and describe federal programs, policies and legal rulings designed to improve the lives of Americans during the 1960s. (Government, Economics)

**Objectives:** Students will be able to

- describe what political left and political right mean (from their perspectives) in our modern political culture,
- create a map version of the political spectrum,

- analyze the perspectives of the left and right while addressing issues (the left and right arguments for/against and where they would fall on the political spectrum), and
- list at least two historical examples of when the forces on the right or left have made changes in society.

### Background:

I came up with the idea of this lesson while attending a graduate geography education class at IUS. We were discussing the idea that you could plot anything on a map. The political spectrum is often something that comes up, especially when discussing contemporary issues in politics. Students have often heard of left, right, liberal and conservative, all in relation to democrat and republican, but usually cannot explain what they mean.

By allowing students to sort through information on their own and to develop a visual representation on their own, my hope is that they will become more familiar with the terms, with the issues, and with the relationships within the political spectrum. My interest is not in swaying them to one side or the other, but getting them oriented so they can sort out their own political ideology-where they stand on the issues and what they think. Also, in the framework of Geography and History of the World, they will make correlations between the political spectrum and ideological movements that occurred and were resisted throughout history.

### Materials required:

- Overhead/Smart Board
- Pencils, blank papers and textbooks
- Attached handouts/definitions if needed
- Attached Power Point if needed (modify/use what you need)

### Procedures:

- Ask students what the important issues of the next election are going to be.
- They will list things like the war, unemployment, economy, religion/prayer in school, and/or public facilities, abortion/pro-life, etc.
- Have students list the opposite sides of each argument.
- Break students into groups and have them make two lists.
- Each list should be made up of one side of each political argument - arranged with commonalities. In other words, they are to guess which arguments of issues would come from the same group or be oriented to similar sides.
- *Here is an example of a list*

List One	List Two
Pro Choice	Pro Life
Regulated economy	Un-regulated economy (laissez-faire)
Individual above the state	State above the individual
Anti-war /typically anti-war (dove)	Typically pro-war (hawk)

- Students may not be correct when creating the list. That is fine, as long as they are discussing it logically. The effort here is to get them to see common perspectives on different issues. Objectively monitor the discussions.
- Return to a full class discussion.
- Ask them if they have heard of political left/right, liberal/conservative, and the political spectrum.
- Clarify and go over the definitions of the terms. (See Appendix A)
- Discuss the origins of the spectrum. (Europe-consult or refer to your world text)
- Discuss the physical position of political chambers.
- Review or introduce the definitions of laissez-faire, capitalism, socialism, fascism, authoritarian, libertarian, individual, and common good.
- Present the attached Power Point that shows the variety of ways the political spectrum can be presented and discussed.
- Ask students how this is similar to cartography.
- *Some correlations to conventional cartography could be*
  - Political maps are based on perspective.

- Political maps are based on orientation.
- Like flat maps and globes, the spectrum can be arced such that two extreme positions can end up in the same general area.
- A linear spectrum is much like lines of longitude.

### **Questions/Home Work:**

At the end of class, students will be given homework. The following people, groups, and issues/platforms would be designated left or right on a table or political spectrum designed by the student or handed out blank by the instructor, and turned in the following day.

Thomas Jefferson, John Locke, Czar Nicolas of Russia, King Louis XVI, communism, socialism, Franklin Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover, Civil Rights, Federalists, Anti-Federalists, Reform movements in 1840s America, progressives, large corporate business owners, anarchists, labor movement, New Deal, Hitler, Stalin, Gandhi, radical, abolitionists, women suffragettes, advocates of social security, advocates of welfare, advocates of free market

*(Note-you may alter this list to suit your topic. For example, if you are covering the progressive era in U.S. History, you may stick to the characters/issues from that era.)*

### **Assessment:**

The assessment would be based upon class work and the homework that is turned in. This topic would encompass a portion of a larger unit. They would be asked on a test to draw the spectrum and place certain items on it.

### **Adaptations and Extensions:**

This could be used as a jump point for current political races. Students could evaluate their representatives and determine where they fall on the spectrum based on their platforms/perspectives.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Political Left**

The people and groups who advocate liberal, often radical measures to effect change in the established order, especially in politics, usually to achieve the equality, freedom, and well-being of the common citizens of a state. Also called *left wing*. (from Answers.com)

### **Political Right**

The opposite of left. As with the term left-wing, the label right-wing has many connotations which vary over time and are often only understood within the particular political context. In advanced liberal democracies, perhaps more than anything else the right has been defined in opposition to socialism or social democracy. As a result, the ideologies and philosophies of right-wing political parties have included elements of conservatism, Christian democracy, liberalism, libertarianism, and nationalism; and for extreme-right parties racism and fascism. As the policy platforms of parties have varied, so has the popular conception of the left-right dimension. In surveys, self-placement on a 'left-right' scale is associated with attitudes on economic policy, especially redistribution and privatization/ nationalization, post-materialism, and (particularly in Catholic countries) religiosity. (from Answers.com)

Note: You might use this as an opportunity to use your textbooks and the definitions they provide. For example, I would have students look at page 578 in McDougal Littell's World History Patterns of Interaction where it is covered in the framework of the French Revolution.

### **Resources for ideas and visuals on Power Points:**

- <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/3665>
- <http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~garfinkm/Spectrum.html>
- <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/spectrum.xpd>
- [http://rationalrevolution.net/articles/redefining\\_the\\_political\\_spectrum.htm](http://rationalrevolution.net/articles/redefining_the_political_spectrum.htm) panel 1-10
- <http://www.conservative-resources.com/right-wing-vs-left-wing.html> panel 11 and 12